

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 340

CS 217 298

AUTHOR Hyslop, Nancy
TITLE Hispanic Parental Involvement in Home Literacy. ERIC Digest D158.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CS-00-09
PUB DATE 2000-11-00
NOTE 4p.
CONTRACT ED-99-CO-0028
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, Indiana University, 2805 E. 10th Street, Suite 140, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698. Tel: 800-759-4723 (Toll Free); Web site: <http://eric.indiana.edu>.
PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Hispanic Americans; Limited English Speaking; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; *Parent Student Relationship; Program Descriptions; Resource Materials
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Noting that people of Hispanic origin represent one of the largest minority groups in the United States, this digest points out that, for Hispanic students, success in school is a complex process, dependent on both the actions of parents and teachers separately and also on their interactions. The digest provides an overview of: (1) problems Hispanic parents encounter as they become involved in their children's literacy development; (2) programs that help Hispanic parents become more effective partners with their children and their children's school; and (3) resources that provide useful information for parents, teachers, and administrators. The first section outlines findings from recent studies that discuss the effects of cultural differences, parents' lack of self-esteem, and a host of misconceptions. Descriptions of six effective programs that have helped Hispanic parents comprise the digest's second section. The third section offers brief descriptions of five information resources providing useful information for parents, teachers, and administrators. (Contains 14 references.) (SR)

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Digest

Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

EDO-CS-00-09

Indiana University
2805 E. 10th St., Suite 140

D158

Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847, (800) 759-4723

Hispanic Parental Involvement in Home Literacy

by Nancy Hyslop

People of Hispanic origin represent one of the largest minority groups in the United States. For Hispanic students, success in school is a complex process, dependent on both the actions of parents and teachers separately and also on their interactions (Paratore et al. 1999).

The purpose of this digest is to provide an overview of:

- (1) problems Hispanic parents encounter as they become involved in their children's literacy development,
- (2) programs that help Hispanic parents become more effective partners with their children and their children's school,
- (3) resources that provide useful information for parents, teachers and administrators.

Problems encountered by Hispanic parents

Hispanic parents are frequently unaware of practices essential to helping their children develop academic skills. They may be confused about what the school expects from their children and feel uncertain about how to help their children. Several recent studies address the effects of cultural differences, parents' lack of self-esteem, and a host of misconceptions, discussed below.

Low Self-esteem

Recent studies by Hughes et al. (1999), Keltly (1997), and Paratore (1999) explore reasons why some Hispanic parents are hindered by low self-esteem. They found that some parents have been unsuccessful in school, and therefore the entire school experience causes anxiety. Some feel that because of the language barrier, they are powerless to make a difference in their children's education. And some view teachers as the experts and do not feel comfortable questioning them.

Culture Shock

The process of acculturation, internalizing a host culture's identity, is more acute for some immigrants than others. Lambourne and Zinn (1993) found immigrant families may go through psychological adaptations such as culture shock as they encounter a new culture. Keltly (1997) found that because the Hispanic culture emphasizes obedience and respect for adult authority, many parents are more likely to communicate with their children in a direct style than to engage their curiosity by talking with them and reading to them. Consequently, the parents fail to lay a strong foundation for building academic skills.

Misconceptions

Although it is true that culture shock and low self-esteem play an important part in understanding the problems Hispanic parents face, the literature suggest that many other factors are also at work. Moles (1993) reported that in a recent national survey of teachers, Hispanic parents' lack of interest and support was the most frequently cited educational problem. However, according to Snow (1991) "...even

children with nurturing home literacy environments did poorly in reading if school practices were inadequate."

Paratore et al. (1999) found evidence suggesting that despite limited English proficiency, low levels of education, and few economic resources, when parents were provided opportunities to learn from and collaborate with teachers, all were willing and able to do so consistently and effectively. Yet in some cases children still failed.

Keltly (1997) found evidence that Spanish speaking parents are comfortable with parent conferences, interactive workshops and, to an extent, home visits. These findings contradict previous research indicating that parent involvement programs do not reach Hispanic parents.

Moreno and Lopez (1999) found the relationship between acculturation level and personal, contextual, and involvement factors to be complex. They found that although less acculturated Hispanic parents reported less knowledge about school activities and more barriers to involvement, they had high levels of perceived efficacy relevant to parent involvement, educational expectations and spousal support.

The study by Paratore et al. (1999), conducted in conjunction with their Intergenerational Literacy Project, found that in all the Latino families studied, the practice of family literacy was in an important and integral part of family life long before parents joined the project. These researchers concluded that "...looking to family literacy interventions as the primary solution to the problems of school failure for many Latino children is to dismiss the complexity of challenges they face both inside and outside of school."

Effective programs that have helped Hispanic parents

Two ESL teachers looked at parent involvement and culture traits of Hispanics to better incorporate Hispanic families into the school system. The project helped teachers realize that cultural differences effect the ways in which students and parents react to the school system. (Rodgers and Lyon 1999)

Short (1998) reports that eighteen states, most with high rates of immigration, have developed Newcomer Programs for students who are recent arrivals to the U.S. and have limited English proficiency. Forty three percent of the programs offer classes to orient parents to the United States and 63% offer adults ESL classes either through the program or the school district.

Parents of prekindergarten students in one public school in Texas received instructions in developing a portfolio of their child's literacy development which reflected literacy behavior at home.

The parent/child workshop offers parents specific ways to help their children at home and allows parents to be active participants in their children's education. (Williams and Lundsteen 1997)

The Intergenerational Literacy Project began in 1993 and is now in its sixth year. This project is one component of a partnership between a local university and an urban community where the majority of families are new immigrants to the United States. The project has three goals:

- (1) to provide opportunities for adults to read and respond to literacy materials of personal interest;
- (2) to provide a selection of books, strategies and ideas for adults to share with their children in order to support their literacy learning;
- (3) to provide a forum through which adults can share their family literacy experiences. (Paratore et al. 1999)

Project FLAME (Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando [Learning, Improving, Educating]) is a family literacy program developed in 1989 by Rodriguez-Brown and Shanahan to train parents in different strategies to help their children's literacy learning at home. The objectives of this program are to (1) increase the ability of Hispanic parents to provide literacy opportunities for their children; (2) increase parents' ability to act as positive role models; (3) improve the Hispanic parents' skills so that they can more effectively initiate, encourage, support, and extend their children's literacy learning, and (4) increase and improve relationships between Hispanic families and the schools. (Rodriguez-Brown et al. 1999)

AVANCE is a preschool parenting program in San Antonio that incorporates family culture to achieve significant success with recent and second-generation Mexican-immigrant families. The program targets low-income mothers with young children. Infants and toddlers accompany their mothers to the program and are placed in day care that provides developmental and educational activities. (Romo 1999)

Information Resources for parents, teachers and administrators

Home Literacy Activities: Perceptions and Practices of Hispanic Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities (Hughes et al. 1999) investigated Hispanic parents' perceptions and practices with respect to home reading activities. Parents in this study reported using a wide variety of reading activities on a regular basis, but experienced frustration in helping their children at home.

Involving Hispanic Parents in Improving Educational Opportunities for Their Children (Sosa 1996) discusses logistical barriers such as time, money, safety and child care; attitudinal barriers such as disagreements, dissatisfaction and communication problems; and expectations barriers as forces which hinder involvement of migrant/immigrant parents. This study provides alternative ways to involve these parents as well as strategies to cultivate more successful experiences.

Exploring Home-School Connections: A Family Literacy Perspective on Improving Urban Schools (Nistler and Maers 1999) contributes an understanding of what constitutes family literacy and discusses family literacy programs in terms of three very distinct categories of approaches: Parent Involvement Programs, Intergenerational Programs, and Research on Naturally Occurring Family Literacy programs.

An Examination of Hispanic Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Programs (Kelty 1997) developed a bilingual survey to register the feelings of parents toward involvement in their children's preschool and kindergarten and to determine the unique needs of parents during interactions with the schools. The survey was tested with 50 parents,

and the results were tabulated to determine differences between the feelings of Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents.

Nancy Hyslop, Ed.D. is a freelance writer and editor, and a former teacher at both the high school and university levels. She resides in Bloomington, Indiana.

economic status on Latina mothers' involvement in their children's schooling. This study specifically investigated the influence of sociocultural factors on (1) personal and psychological factors, (2) contextual factors, and (3) levels of involvement.

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Digest #158 is EDO-CS-00-09 and was published in November 2000 by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English and Communication, 2805 E 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408-2698, Telephone (812) 855-5847 or (800) 759-4723. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. Additional copies may be ordered by contacting the ERIC Document Reproduction Service at (800) 443-3742.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0028. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.